Bob - [illegible] on the little Program is a follow-up to this one which will appear in the next issue of Parallel.

Wynne Francis
Sir George Williams University
October 5, 1966

P.S. May I have this typed script back - Thanks
Wynne.

The Literary Underground in Canada

To aficionados it is no news that about twenty Little Magazines are now being published in Canada. Other readers less familiar with this type of periodical are likely to confuse it with several other kinds of literary magazine. For a truer appreciation of what the Little Magazine is, therefore, we may first consider what it is not.

The Little Magazine is not a small magazine hoping to become a Big Magazine. Big Magazines are commercial enterprises thriving on advertising, public sales and wide circulation. They appeal to a large segment of the general public whose opinions they tend to reflect and perhaps to mold. Their range of material is broad, with an emphasis on current affairs. Their interest in literature is minimal or peripheral, exploiting the sensational or human interest angles of the contemporary world of letters. Occasionally they include original creative pieces but these tend to be selected as bait for public controversy or because the writer is a celebrity. Today, in Canada, the most interesting Big Magazine (I am concerned only with those displaying some literary pretensions) is Parallel now in its fourth issue and still trying its bright and earnest best to be really big and really good. Impressive as it may be in its own category, Parallel represents almost everything the Little Magazine holds in anathema.

Nor does the Little Magazine, if it is true to its calling, hanker to become a Small Magazine, though the dividing line here is sometimes wavering and faint. As distinct from the Big Magazine, the Small Magazine appeals to a more select

segment of readers. These are most often college-bred with a developed taste for "the Arts" and for "Literature" in particular. The Small Magazine comprises two types: the scholarly or critical journal which is academically oriented and the independent periodical which mingles contemporary imaginative writing of various kinds with criticism and reviews. Both types are professionally produced, the academic journal being subsidized to this end by the university, the independent journal relying heavily on grants from the Canada Council and other foundations. Neither type could subsist on advertising (which in their case is mostly of the goodwill brand) or on subscriptions, ~~which, because of the limited audience,~~ rarely ~~rise in number above three figures~~.

Of these two types of Small Magazine the independent journal is closer to the Little Magazine but there are still some very basic distinctions. The independent Small Magazine is run on a business basis. Once established, ~~it maintains a salaried staff,~~ it pays its contributors, it actively campaigns for subscriptions and it appears regularly as scheduled. The tone of such a magazine is mature, urbane, liberal; its policy is clear and consistent; its material is drawn from the best established contemporary writers. Though it occasionally publishes the work of an unknown it displays an uncanny ability to pick up-and-coming talents on the eve of their public success. The longer it lives the more such a magazine tends to acquire an air of wisdom, dignity and stability and the less likely it is to reflect the sensibility and aspirations of the young or the avant-~~guarde~~ garde.

Canada has several good, well-established Small Magazines. Of the academic type, Queen's Quarterly and Canadian Literature may stand as liberal examples. Among independent journals, Tamarack Review and The Canadian Forum (despite differences in format and coverage) are of undisputed superiority. Taken as a whole, however, the Small Magazine reflects the sensibility of the intelligent liberal bourgeois and as such it constitutes The Establishment--a veritable

bête noire of the Little Magazine world.

We are now gaining a perspective in which to view the Little Magazine proper, but we must first take note of a common error which is the source of much confusion. The term "Little Magazine" is often stretched to include several kinds of periodical which in fact exist in a literary limbo between the authentic Little Magazine and the independent Small Magazine. It is actually in this limbo, suspended between two worlds, that we find most of Canada's literary journals. By limbo I mean that state in which a literary magazine is uncertain of its direction, is unsure of the nature and potential extent of its public and therefore displays a wavering, eclectic or ambivalent policy. The affluence of Canadian society may be responsible for the appearance in the last few years of a large number of such magazines, several of them quite handsome productions. And perhaps it will take an economic recession to reduce the number to one in more realistic proportion to the actual size of the reading public. Meanwhile such periodicals remain insecure and ambivalent. Since they are professionally produced, they require money and thus find themselves in competition with each other and with the Small Magazines for subscribers, advertising and grants. On the other hand, they are sympathetic to young, new and experimental writers and their lists of contributors partially overlap those of the Little Magazine. As financial pressures increase, however, these magazines in limbo have only this choice: to perish, or to conform more strictly to Small Magazine standards--which means in effect to abandon their flirtation with the world of the Little Magazine. Examples of Canadian magazines currently existing in literary limbo are Edge, Evidence, Cyclic, Quarry and the new Wascana Review and West Coast Review. Several of these have demonstrable potential as Small Magazines--particularly Edge--but it hardly seems likely that Canada can support them all. None of them, except perhaps Evidence, should be confused with the Little Magazine.

The Little Magazine is radically different from anything we have so far considered. Money--though it does require some--is the least of its concerns. It is not a business enterprise and it is characteristically run in a most unbusiness-like fashion. Most frequently it is typed (and reproduced by mimeograph or some such inexpensive means) on cheap paper, its pages being roughly stapled together without a cover. The production of an issue is a labour of love on the part of the editor and the volunteers he is able to gather around him. The magazine is usually begun with intent to publish regularly but it typically lives precariously from issue to issue and is apt to be "published whenever." Little Magazines do not attract and rarely seek paid advertisements. They do rather faithfully advertise each other and the publications of Little Presses, on an exchange basis, without any money changing hands. The charge for subscriptions is minimal--hopefully enough to pay for office materials and postage. But But the normal financial state of a Little Magazine is that it is in debt and the editor and his friends are broke. A few editors, fortunate enough to have rich relatives or fairy godmothers, manage to afford paper covers for their mags, and may even get them into print by way of a hand-press which they have purchased and learned to operate. Occasionally Little Mags are sent out to professional printers, though this is a costly risk. On the one hand, reputable printers and type-setters frequently refuse to print the contents of such periodicals. On the other, when a Little Magazine becomes appearance-proud, it is tempted to seek paid advertisements, subscriptions and grants to meet its printer's bills. It is then on its way to limbo, gradually shedding its Little Mag character and moving towards the category of the Small Magazine.

Physical appearance is not a significant feature of the Little Magazine. Titles, on the other hand, are. They are carefully chosen--sometimes with intent to signify policy--Moment, Island, Delta, Contact, Yes, Now--sometimes merely to avoid the obvious, the traditional, the respectable, and sometimes, with tongue

in cheek to baffle and discourage the uninitiated. Tish sounds innocuous enough until you realize it is a scrambled word; Blew Ointment (deliberately misspelled) has obscurely repugnant connotations; Civ/n is cryptic (an Ezra Pound code word for civilization; Intercourse and Up the Tub With One I Open are titles most readers would hesitate to ask for in a library or a book-store.

Little Mags are not, of course, usually found in book stores and libraries, and "most readers" never come across them. Little Mags, on principle, do not seek public exposure. In fact, they are most often antipathetic to the public. Neither do they often engage in vigorous campaigns for writers or readers. Their subscribers and their contributors, often interrelated, characteristically form a private, intimate audience with a small regional cluster ~~perhaps~~ but extending to a thinly-scattered minority across the continent and perhaps even abroad. Moreover, it is a "given" audience, more often seeking than sought out by the magazine. The Little Magazine, in other words, has no problem identifying its audience--its readers are self-initiated members of a cult who recognize each other by certain attitudes and enthusiasms which prevail in Little Magazines circles.

In fact, the entire Little Magazine movement, including the Little Presses often associated with it, constitutes an underground literary culture which extends, by an intricate and tenuous network, throughout most of the Western World.

This literary underground had its origins in the cénacle publications which began to appear before the turn of the century in Europe. Such periodicals emerged in resistance to the debasement of literary values imposed by the popular commercial press. The function of the cénacle periodical was to ensure freedom for the creative imagination, to provide outlets for experimental writing and to foster the talents of new or unknown writers. The idea spread rapidly to the United States and such periodicals from both sides of the Atlantic were clearly responsible for the launching of the Modern movement in literature. The early

careers of such masters as Eliot, Pound, Lawrence, Joyce, Stein, Williams and many another were intimately bound up with magazines like Blast, Vortex, Criterion, Poetry (Chicago), The Dial, Exile.

The Little Magazine as a successor to the cénacle magazine is less attractive in appearance, less durable physically, but more ubiquitous, plentiful and powerful. It is the result of what may be called the mimeograph revolution--an inexpensive technique of reproduction which released editors from the financial onus born by the printed cénacle magazines. The subsequent increase in numbers of Little Magazines has been phenomenal. In the United States alone there are said to be between four and six hundred. Exact figures are hard to come by because of the ephemeral nature of these publications. But as the magazines multiply so do the numbers of readers and writers who discover in this genre both a means of resisting the surface culture and an opportunity to release thwarted creative energy.

The Little Magazine is essentially subversive--not in a narrow political sense but by its profound and radical aversion to prevailing cultural values. It is significant that its proliferation has been concurrent with the spread of modern urban culture--the type of society, that is, where in commercialism, mass-production and middle-class conformity combine to corrupt and inhibit the creative imagination. The Little Magazines emerge in defiant relation to such a culture wherever it is established. Their function--indeed their mission in regard to it--is at once subversive and redemptive.

It is not surprising that a literary movement with these origins and aims should be characterized by radical experiments with language. Up to the present at least, language has been the prime vehicle of culture. As a man lives so will he write--and read. Thus the Little Magazine, striking at the roots of the prevailing culture, spends some of its energy attacking the rhetoric of that culture and the rest in exploring the untapped resources of language, and the

potential of other media of communication in the hope of discovering new values and new idioms in which to express them.

Such preoccupations account for the "far-out" nature of the contents of many Little Magazines. Much of the material is not offered as "literature"--a word which connotes ~~established~~ fixed and conservative modes. It follows that such contents cannot often be judged by ~~accepted~~ traditional literary standards. Some Little Magazines are not so radically avant-guarde, of course, but all of them are alert to the need for new values and the search for fresh modes. That is their function; that is why they attract young writers, experimental and unconventional writers; and it is why they seldom seek or find readers unsympathetic to these aims. They also, unfortunately, attract a variety of malcontents, professional beatniks and middle-aged teenagers. These provide whatever notoriety accrues to Little Magazines but they should not be mistaken for the main constituency of the genre. The Little Magazine as an international phenomenon is sustained not by clowns, fools or dilettantes but by sober and dedicated seekers after radically new premises for human worth.

Not all these generalizations apply to every Little Magazine, ~~of course~~. Some Mags are frivolous; some are anarchic; some are surprisingly conservative; some are partisan; and every one naturally feels that it is unique, as well as being a link in the international network. The generalizations here offered have been intended to distinguish the Little Magazine as a genre from other literary periodicals and to prepare us thereby to view some Canadian Little Magazines in their proper perspective.

The Little Magazine made its first genuine appearance in Canada in the early Forties--at a time, that is, when this country began to exhibit clearly the characteristics of a modern urban society. It was the function, then, of Little

Mags like Contemporary Verse, Preview, First Statement and Direction to subvert the prevailing literary values of a lingering genteel Romanticism and to establish Modern poetry in Canada. (Northern Review, which emerged at the end of that decade is an example of a Little Magazine which forsook its avant-~~guarde~~ garde mission and was eventually transformed into one of Canada's important Small Magazines.)

During the Fifties another flash of Little Mags erupted--Contact, Civ/n, Combustion, Moment, Delta, to name a few. All of these played their role of keeping Modern literature alive in Canada, of fostering new talent, and of steering Canadian letters into the contemporary international stream. (It is perhaps worth noting that it was mainly in the pages of such magazines that the talents of Irving Layton, Raymond Souster and Alfred Purdy were fostered, but it would be a grave mistake to deduce from this that the Little Mag is a mere stepping-stone to fame and fortune.)

All the magazines so far mentioned are now defunct, including Delta, which has been recently absorbed by Yes. But the Sixties have provided Canada with another bumper crop of Little Mags. Their addresses range from coast to coast with a high concentration in both Ontario and British Columbia. But though they may be regional in origin, they are international in scope. No authentic Little Mag is nationalistic in purpose, though it may naturally give greater attention to writers in its own country. (However, a very new one called Now may prove the exception--its advance notice has a lot to say about Canadianism.)

From eastern Canada come, curiously enough, the less radical examples. Fiddlehead (New Brunswick) and Yes (Montreal) both retain a hold on the traditional literary sensibility while welcoming fresh renditions of it. Their role lies not so much in the experimental area as in encouraging new writers and in giving attention to older writers whose work has so far been ignored or insufficiently publicized. An example is the current issue of Yes devoted to the work of John Glassco. It is interesting to speculate as to whether the policies of

Yes will be modified by its absorption of Delta which used to be considerably more avant-~~guarde~~ garde. As they stand now, Fiddlehead is eclectic in policy and modest in format, while Yes is given to dramatic covers, experimental format and numerous illustrations. From Montreal also comes Intercourse, conservatively modern in a rough, tough way but with a refreshing note of humour. It views both itself and its readers ironically.

The Western magazines are much more partisan and experimental. Tish (Vancouver) has been largely responsible for introducing "New Wave" poetry into Canada. It is preoccupied with a radically new poetics derived from the so-called Black Mountain poets Olson, Duncan and Creeley. Imago (Calgary) fosters a modified version of the Tish aesthetic and is dedicated to the long poem or series of poems. Island, Ganglia and Weed are carrying the Black Mountain gospel to central and Eastern Canada. (Island has just spawned a wee one called Is, dedicated to the Occasional Poem.)

Open Letter (Victoria) is an intimate in-group mag circulated mainly among Tish alumni. It is designed, however, as an open forum for debate on poetry. Readers who are at ease in the Black Mountain idiom may wish to participate. The magazine is free on request.

Blew Ointment (Vancouver) is the most radically experimental of Canada's Little Mags. Neo-Dadaist in conception, it often uses the typewriter as a drawing pencil. It exhibits a typical avant-~~guarde~~ garde tendency to strain against the limits of language as we know it, and to subject it to graphic and film techniques in order to release its visual potential.

Perhaps the most original Little Mag in Canada is Alphabet (London, Ontario). Subtitled as "dedicated to the iconography of the imagination," Alphabet explores the mythic dimensions of literary expression and the calligraphic and ideographic potentials of language.

The avant-~~guarde~~ garde in recent years has tended to favour forms of expression in

which several arts are mingled. The affinity of Beat poetry and jazz is an example; and more recently the mixing of folk-singing and poetry. The latest Little Mag in Canada seems to have something like this in mind. It combines an interest in pop art with a literary folksiness of the Bobbie Dylan variety. It is appropriately called Pop-See-Cul.